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Date: 8/3/2018 2:00:44 PM
Subject: Weekly Update: Grass, medians, and who's responsible



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Friends,

Let's talk about grass.

No, really.

The height of grass and weeds in medians across our city has been a topic of more discussion this summer, particularly since the [maintenance of many of those areas passed back into the hands of the Tennessee Department of Transportation](#) on July 1. (More on that in a moment.)

I know you share my desire to have a cleaner city. We take cutting the grass and picking up litter at City-owned properties seriously. Like so many other things around here, we measure it and we track it.

For instance, cutting the grass at our 150 City-maintained parks every three weeks is the major part of our \$6.2 million annual parks maintenance budget. To increase that to every two weeks would cost about \$2.4 million more.

Our Division of General Services cuts grass at 55 City facilities and 182 city-owned vacant lots every two weeks, at a cost of about \$2.4 million per year.

And on City-owned rights-of-way (that's government-speak mostly for medians on City streets), we cut the grass and pick up litter every other week from April to November. That costs about \$2.4 million of your tax dollars each year.

To do it each week during those months would, of course, double that — to roughly \$4.9 million. Adding in year-round litter collection during the dormant grass growing season would cost another \$1.2 million.

Let's tie all that into the big picture. As you know, population loss and lack of growth are our No. 1 challenge. Reversing those items is the main driver of all we do. As a result of that, our budget really only produces about a 1.5 percent growth in revenue each year — about \$10 million.

In that \$10 million each year, we have to pay for other things we want to do — like pay our police officers and fire fighters more (which we have), fully fund our pension (which we've made progress on), and increase programming in libraries and parks and community centers (which we've also done).

Due to our focus on public safety and these tight finances, we haven't been able to increase the frequencies of cutting grass that we outlined above. We will work to squeeze more value out of what we do in the years to come, though.

Anyway, back to those state routes. They're some of the most prominent streets in the city — like Poplar, Elvis Presley, East and North Parkways, Jackson Avenue, and Germantown Parkway.

We were spending \$2.5 million each year just to mow the state's grass, but the state was only reimbursing us about \$1.5 million. Instead of continuing to use your tax dollars like that on state property, we chose to end that contract and use that money to focus on neighborhood streets.

It's the right decision. Just as we should take care of our properties like parks and community centers, the state should be in charge of its property. Just as you wouldn't expect the City to, say, mop the floors at the County building or change the light bulbs at the federal building, you shouldn't expect the City to cut the grass on state property. All the other larger cities in Tennessee reached this conclusion years before us.

Yet, I dislike tall grass in the medians in our city just like you. **So, I'm doing two things:**

1. As we did in the weeks and months leading up to the end of our contract, we are continuing to ask the state to increase its frequency of service on these state routes. We will make it one of our priorities in our upcoming legislative agenda, too. You can help: Find your state legislator [here](#) and send them an email to let them know this is important to you. (And, you can call TDOT at 684-5467 to report an issue.)
2. I've authorized us to supplement the state's grass cutting schedule through the rest of the year on particularly problematic and high-profile state routes. This will cost us about \$90,000 to \$110,000 the rest of this year, depending on how many times it's needed. We aren't taking back over maintenance by any stretch, but we do plan to help the state out with its work in the short term.

Congratulations, everyone: I'm sure you saw all of the winners in last night's elections. We had one City race — the special election for City Council in Super District 9, Position 2. I've enjoyed getting to know Ford Canale and am looking forward to partnering with him on our shared goals of advancing Memphis.

I'm also eager to work with Shelby County Mayor-Elect Lee Harris, an old colleague of mine on the City Council.

Our priorities and platforms to combat the challenges we have in Memphis and Shelby County are remarkably similar — tough on violent crime, relentless on poverty reduction, and eager to get more good jobs and grow the community we all love. I was particularly thrilled to hear how pro-transit he was during the campaign. We've been putting in the work to plan a brighter future for

MATA, and I look forward to welcoming the mayor-elect to the table.

I appreciate the ideas and energy David Lenoir brought to the race, too. He has been a terrific partner while serving as Trustee, and his work the past eight years in the field of financial empowerment is a great legacy.

I'm excited to continue our work with Sheriff-Elect Floyd Bonner, who has already been an outstanding shoulder-to-shoulder partner in our efforts to reduce crime. As Chief Deputy, he was a key part of our Fed Up initiative and in various staffing partnerships. I also give credit to Dale Lane, whose work at the Shelby County Office of Preparedness has been superb, and who ran an admirable race for Sheriff.

Congratulations to everyone who offered themselves for public service in the elections. Win or lose, simply raising your hand to enter the debate is admirable, and I appreciate everyone who took part in the conversation about the future of our county this summer.

Come see us: There's so much opportunity in Memphis, and we're holding an event tomorrow to connect you to it. Our 2018 Opportunity Memphis Career Fair will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Pipkin Building. Stop by — and share this with anyone else who needs to know.

Yours,



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